17-25 E. Cross

H.S. 14-3-15-83

THE FOLLETT HOUSE
17-25 E. Cross Street

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Geography 630
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19-25 E. CROSS

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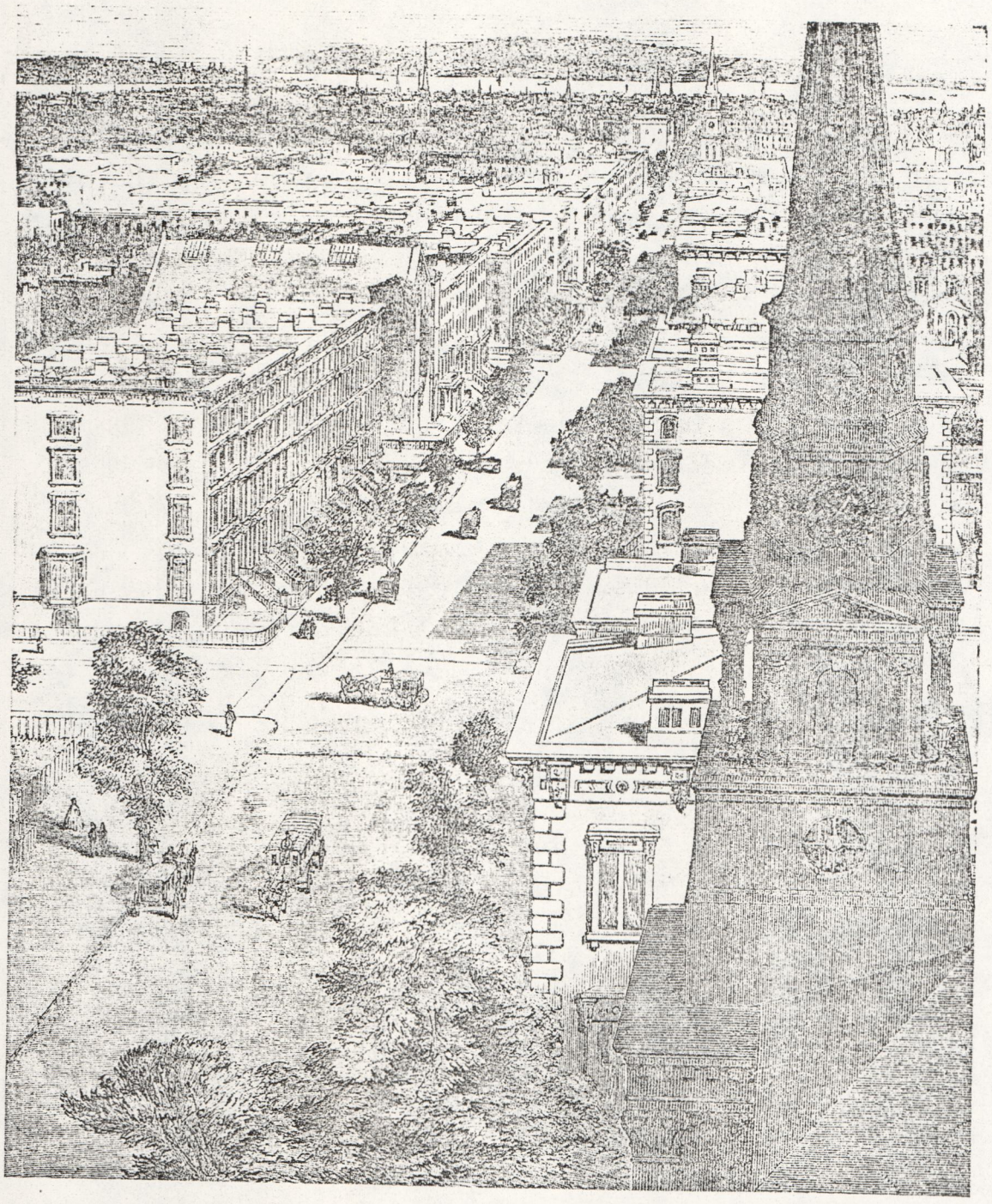


ITALIANATE FOR HOME AND OFFICE

(A) View of Fifth Avenue, New York, looking south from 36th Street, in 1857. The "round styles," easily executed, demanding no great scholarly erudition, dominated American architecture during the 1850s. As the view here makes evident, New York by the 1850s already had rows of brownstone Italianate houses, many of which still survive today. Less fortunate have been the commercial store fronts and office fronts (usually more decidedly Renaissance, to emphasize "civic enterprise") prefabricated in iron by firms like those of Daniel Badger and James Bogardus; of the many famous examples built all over the country, only a few now remain.

fig. 1

I. Description

A. Style

The Follett House stands as a symbol of the pre-eminence of Ypsilanti in the mid-ninteenth century. The building occupies the commercial space from 17 to 25 E. Cross Street in the area known as Depot Town in eastern Ypsilanti. It is typical of the Italian commercial style which "emphasized civic enterprise"[1] in the middle years of the last century.(fig.1)

Scarcely a decade after the "Italianate" style was introduced, the Huron House, later to be called the Follett House was built as an overnight accomodation for railway passengers, as well as commercial enterprises which met the needs of the local citizenry. " During the 1850's the Italianate manner became the closest thing to a national style the United States had since the earliest days of the classic revivals."[2] The building followed the common form: "elegant and yet informal, simple in line yet lavish in decoration."[3] (fig. 2,3,4)

B. Plan

The building is located on the north side of Cross Street just east of the Huron River. It is a four-story structure, sixty feet by one hundred feet, of brick. It rises from a rubble and earthen basement to a flat roof with paired end chimneys. The foundation is of split field stone. Early photos and bracket traces indicate the original existence of a large cornice. (fig. 5)

C. Elevation

Because of the multi-purpose nature of the building the window forms and shapes vary greatly. "The second floor of the structure is clearly expressed by the windows and early photographs show that there was a small overhanging balcony at the central bay."[4] There are six different

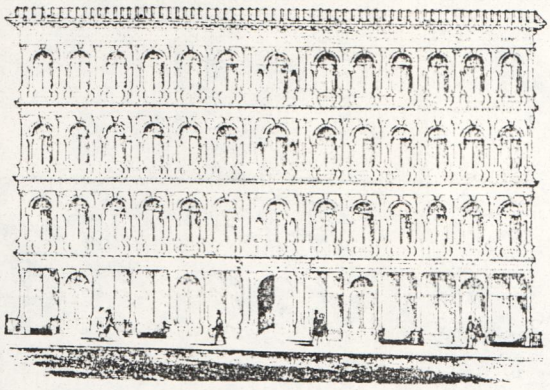


fig. 2

1. Wide eaves
2. Large brackets
3. Tall first floor windows
4. Low pitch hip roof
5. Cupola
6. Double doors with glass panels
7. String course
8. Rusticated quoins
9. Stilted segmental window
10. Round arch
11. Hood mold or eyebrow window heads
12. Paired brackets
13. 2-light or pane sash
14. Enriched overdoor
15. Ancones

E. Italianate Commercial Building, Nashville, Tennessee
Earmarks of the Italianate Style pictured here include the low roof pitch, bracketed cornice, round and segmental arched windows with decorative "eyebrows," recessed entry. These decorative features were applied to a huge variety of residential, commercial, and institutional buildings of all shapes and sizes.

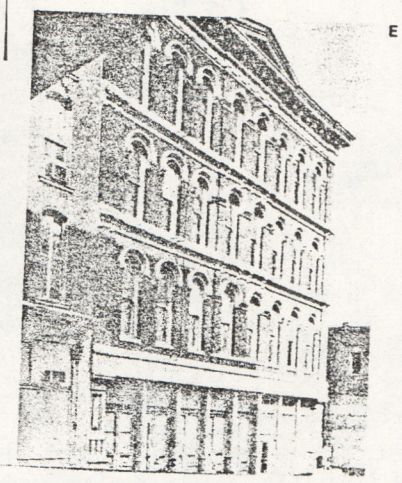
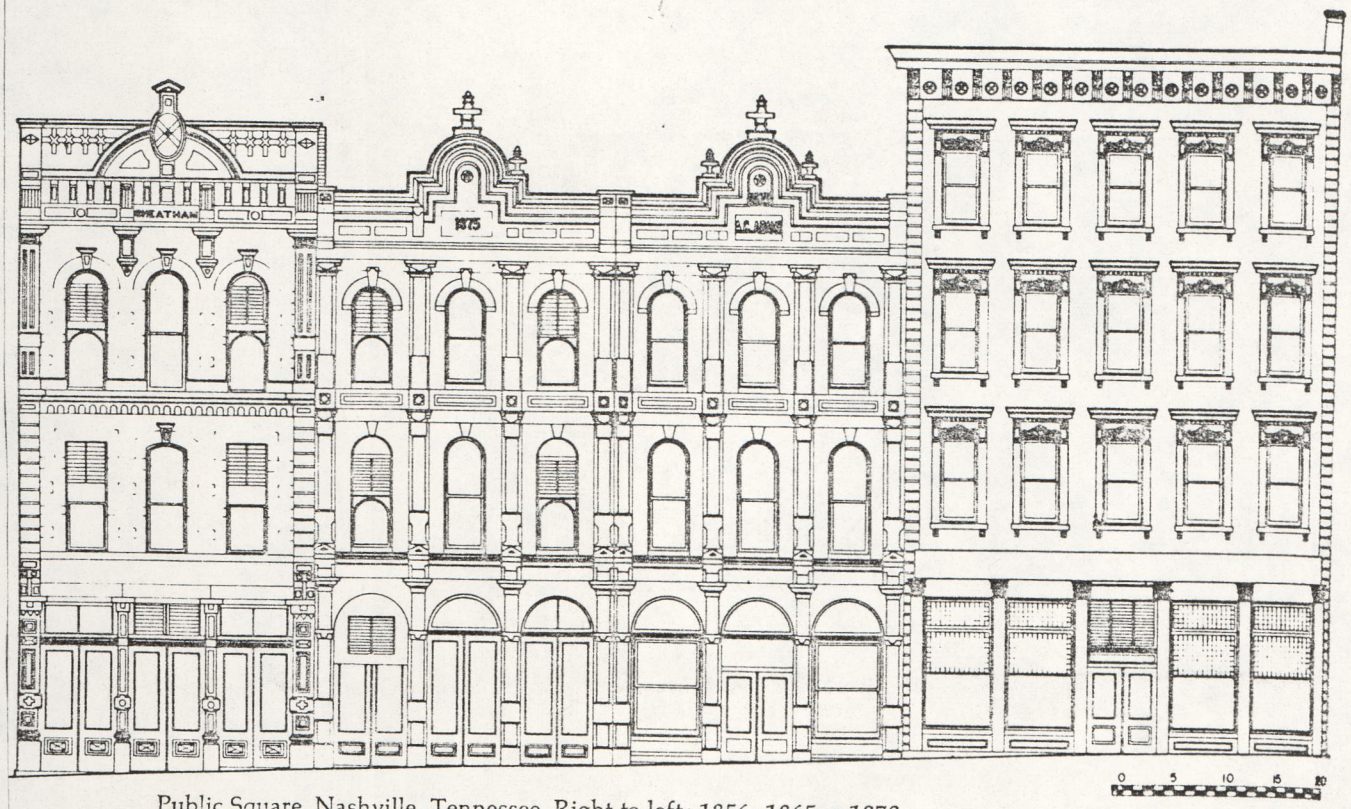


fig. 3



Public Square. Nashville, Tennessee. Right to left: 1856; 1865; c.1878—increasingly elaborate Italianate ornament.

fig. 4

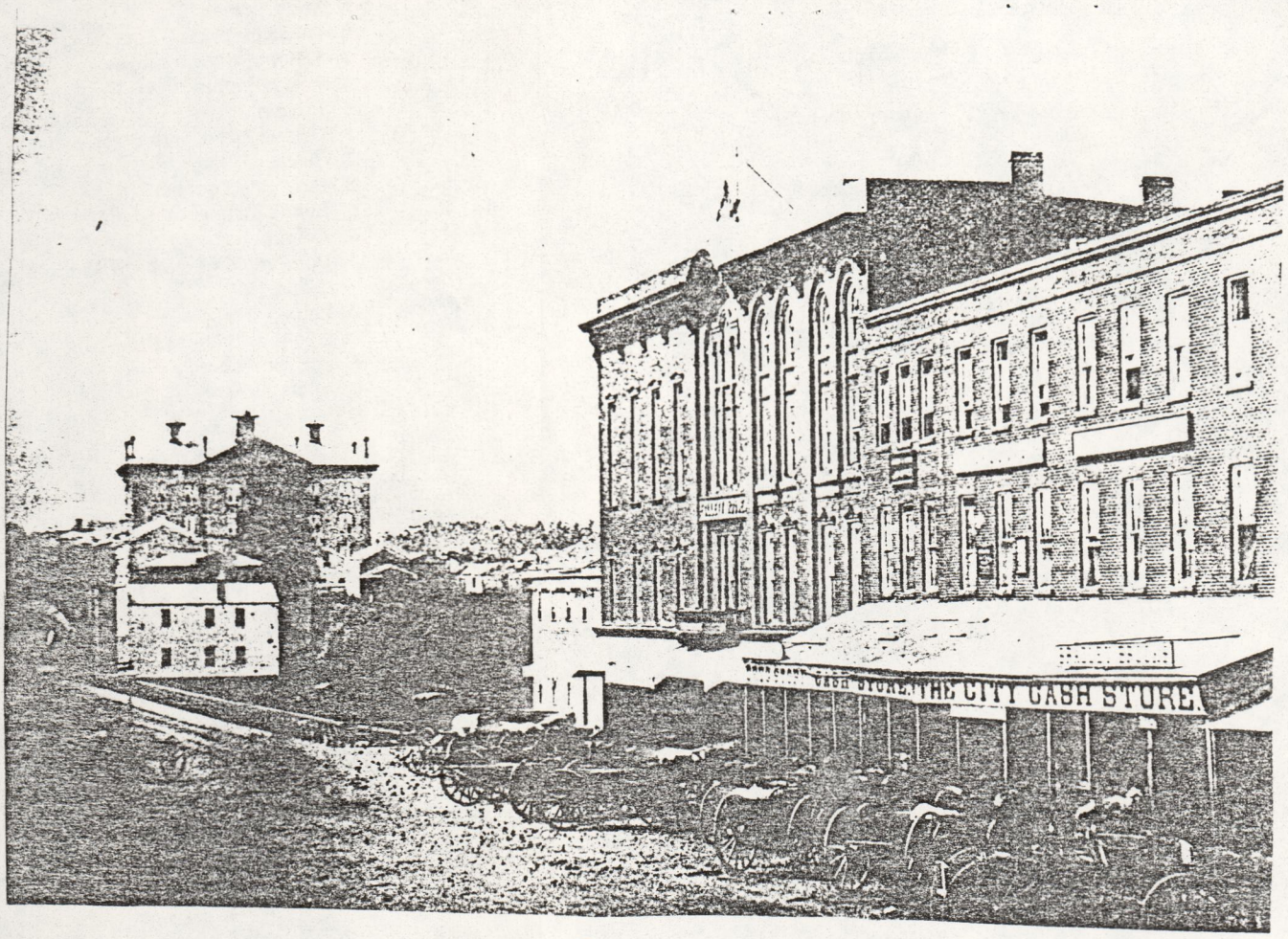
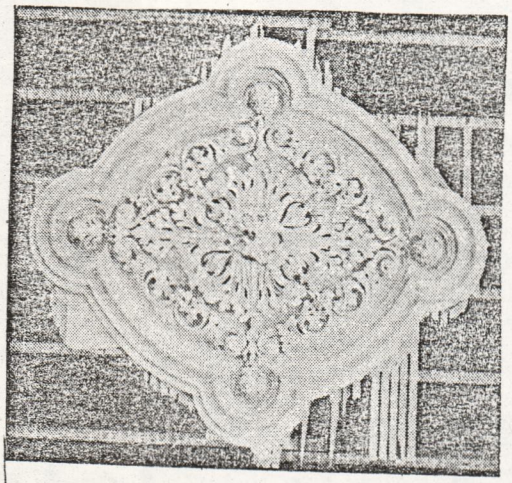


fig. 5



Ballroom accent

fig. 6

types of window hoods and trim. On the east end of the facade the two-story Roman windows on the third floor and fourth floor are emphasized with hood molds with corbel stops separated by piers and underlined by a beltcourse. On the second floor the windows have decorative hoods of a simple design.

On the west side of the facade there are only three levels delineated by elongated double hung windows. These "subtly express the presence of a two-story ballroom..., spanned with heavy timber trusses with iron tie rods which afford a forty-foot span."[5] The window hoods are less ornate on the west side, being simply described by cast iron lintels and sills. There are no archvolts or beltcourse.(fig.6)

The original entrance to the hotel reveals that the central complex bays are highlighted by compound Roman arches with a double curve pediment on the upper floors which extends to break the roofline with a gentle curve. The horizontality is maintained by the decorative stone bands and incised stone carvings along the roof line. The finely carved finial which was clearly evident is old photos no longer crowns the entryway.

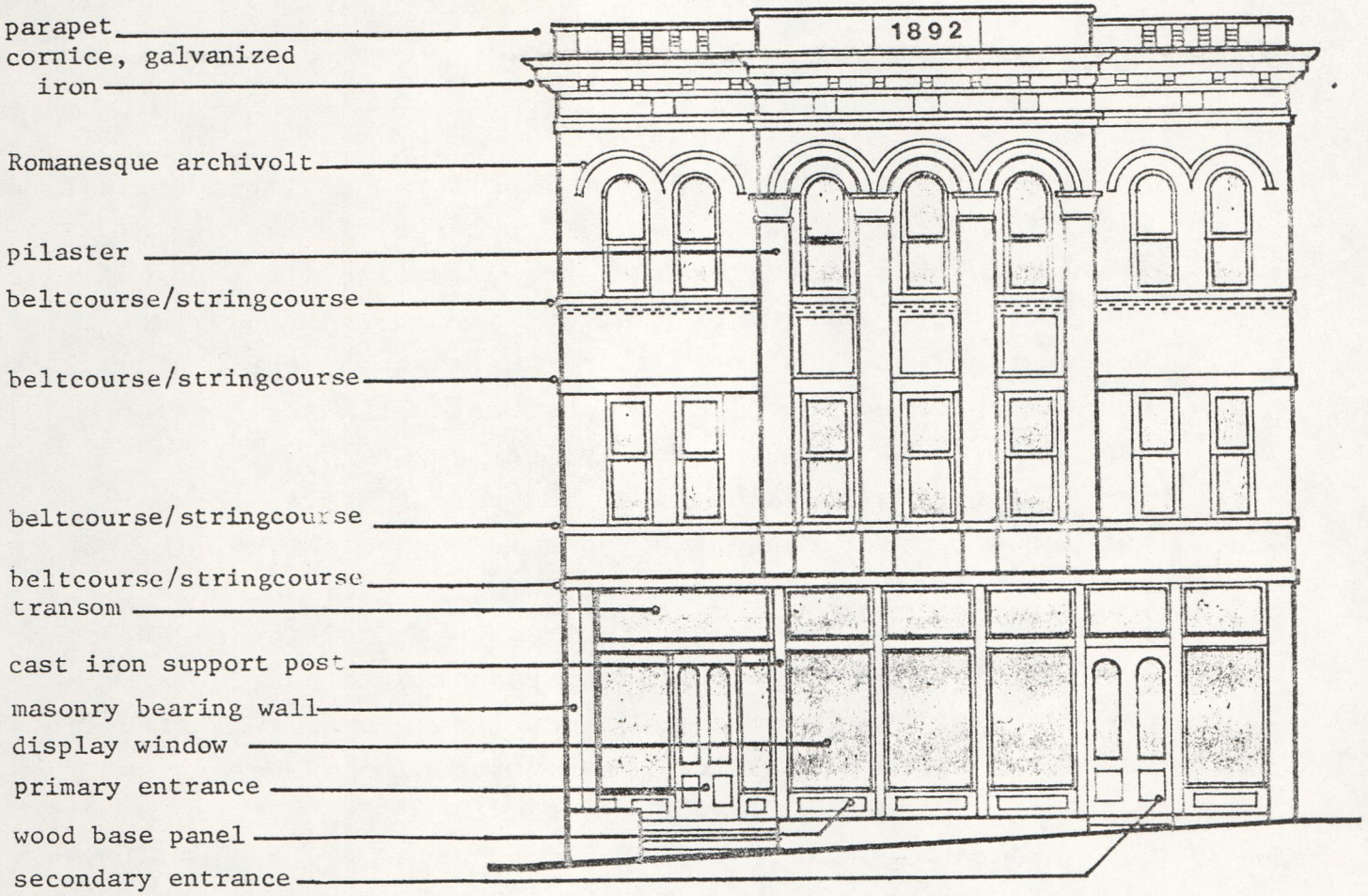
On the street level, the building is typical of the Italian "mercantile palazzo [with]...broad expanses of glass windows framed by columns in the round with rich capitals and cornices"[6] The bracketed wooden storefronts with wide cornices and iron columns or pilasters"interpreted in masonry,.. [which] appeared in every American city large or small."[7] The columns still bear the name of the manufacturer-"McCullough Mfg."

The storefront on the west facade, number seventeen, is in the process of being restored, with transom over the door and sidelights being added. Each of the other storefronts at nineteen, twenty-one, twenty-three and twenty-five each is unique and yet harmonious.

Typical Italianate Features:

rectangular
multi-story
wide eaves
brackets
tall thin windows
moldings and details
string/belt course
rustication
central bay
masonry bearing wall
cast iron columns
cornices

IDENTIFYING FEATURES OF THE COMMERCIAL BUILDING



The Harding Building; South Elevation

Owners of the
Harding Building

Joe L. Johnson
Carl Ray Furr
Robert D. Montgomery
P. O. Box 22541
Jackson, MS 39205

Architects

Goodman and Mockbee
P.O. Box 4569
Jackson, MS 39216

Contractor
Wise Construction Co.
Jackson, MS

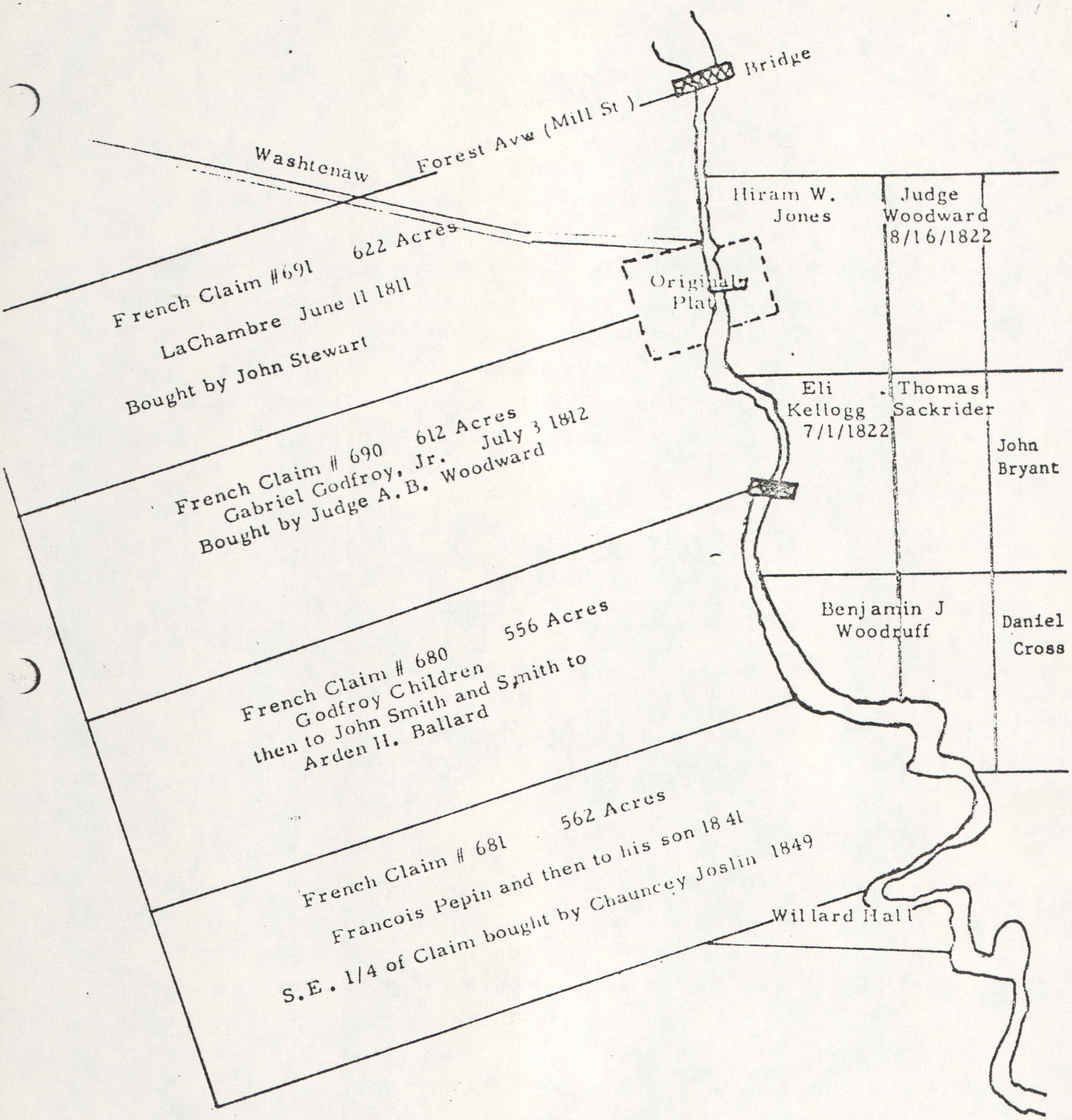
II-History

The Follett House-the name itself rings with a certain dignity. To trace its history is to trace the history of Ypsilanti. Less than thirty years after the first permanent settlers arrived by flatboat at "The Landing" (now Rawsonville) and pushed westward to the area near what is now the intersection of Grove and Prospect Roads, an inn was built on the site of the Follett House.

The earliest residents of Woodruff's Grove, the early settlement, moved closer to the main communication link between Chicago and Detroit-the Chicago Road. Judge Augustus Woodward came to the rescue in the search to find a new name for the tiny community. Being a student of classics, he was aware of the Greek Revolution. The hero of that struggle caught Woodward's fancy, a hero by the name of Demetrius Ypsilanti. Hence, the unusual name stuck.

From the earliest years,shortly after the French Claims were sold to Woodward, Harwood and Steward, two communities developed, one on the east bank of the Huron River one on the west bank. (fig.7)Each side had its advantages and at one point it looked as though there would be a Ypsilanti and an East Ypsilanti.

The two men who helped to "pull the city together" were Mark Norris and Benjamin Follett. " In 1838, Benjamin Follett, a man of large enterprise and who did more than any other one man to build the city came to Ypsilanti."[8] Foremost among his contributions was building the depot which helped link Ypsilanti with Detroit by rail. For his part, Norris early on built a sawmill at the Frog Island Mill Race which provided necessary timber for building the


Bridge
Washtenaw
Forest Avw (Mill St)
Hiram W. Jones
Judge Woodward 8/16/1822
French Claim #691 622 Acres
LaChambre June 11 1811
Bought by John Stewart
Original Plat
Eli Kellogg 7/1/1822
Thomas Sackrider
John Bryant
French Claim # 690 612 Acres
Gabriel Godfroy, Jr. July 3 1812
Bought by Judge A.B. Woodward
Benjamin J Woodruff
Daniel Cross
French Claim # 680 556 Acres
Godfroy Children
then to John Smith and Smith to
Arden H. Ballard
French Claim # 681 562 Acres
Francois Pepin and then to his son 1841
S.E. 1/4 of Claim bought by Chauncey Joslin 1849
Willard Hall

EARLY CLAIM LOCATIONS
IN YPSILANTI

fig. 7

#6

Ypsilanti Historical Museum
220 North Huron Street
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

tracks and for fueling the steam locomotives. He also provided a needed physical link between the two Ypsilantis, he funded the building of the Cross Street bridge.

The two men were both from upstate New York, and came to Michigan during the "land boom" of the 1830s. Their names were to be joined not only with Ypsilanti's history, but with one another for the next quarter century;Norris became Follett's father-in-law. The men were prominent in every facet of the economic, political and social fabric of their community:

> The name of Benjamin Follett is intimately connected with the history of Ypsilanti banking. A few days after his arrival in Michigan from Palmyra, New York, and while yet under eighteen years of age, he entered the employ of Ypsilanti Bank. Passing through the days of the wild-cat craze and of frenzied financial speculation, he acquired much valuable information as to how a banking business should not run. When, in 1852, he entered upon the organization of a new banking concern, it was with purpose and ideals that made for trustworthiness and stability.[9]

In additon to banking, Follet was a partner with Norris in several other industries:paper mills, flour mills, the Farmer's General Store, real estate ventures, and the manufacture of doors and sashes. Norris was never the mayor, but he was the "power behind the throne". Follett did serve on the first city council and later as the third mayor of Ypsilanti. "According to the 1865 tax rolls, he tied with two others as the third richest man in Ypsilanti."[10]

The railroad was the central focus of the area east of the river called Depot Town. The original depot building was a simple clapboard structure. With hundreds of passen-

gers passing through the area each day, merchants soon recognized a need to provide all of the necessary services. At one time there were four hotels in the area.These elegant Italianate buildings surpassed in elegance the depot. Follet pressed for a more attractive depot building. The current station is all that remains of the once outstanding Victorian structure once said to be the most "attractive on the Michigan Central Line".[11] The gardens and and beautifully manicured lawn provided a charming backdrop for the depot. (fig. 8)

With the railroad as a spur to development, the Cross Street commercial area became the center of the business community. The building which stood out among all of the rest was the hotel known originally as the "Huron House". It opened amidst amuch celebration on July 4, 1859. The building was built by John Davis and financed by the stock company of which Follett was a principal stockholder.

In 1862, Abiel Hawkins, also owner of the Hawkins House on Michigan Avenue, took over the management. He and his son Walter were to be followed by William Tisdale in the management role, and later by the Cutter family. It was used as a hotel until late in the 1890s.In its day, it was said to be the "best hotel from Detroit to Chicago."[12] The Hotel's stationery read," House heated with steam, good sample rooms, free conveyance to any part of the city."[13]

The third floor ballroom was the largest public space in Ypsilanti. At one time, the floor contained deadening powders so the patrons in the rest of the building would not be disturbed. Many social events were held there; stories have circulated that everyone from the Booth Family to Jenny Lind to the Ypsilanti High basketball team appeared. The

performers that have been documented are:"General Tom Thumb, the Bavarian Glass-blowers, Buffalo Bill and The Christy Minstrels."[14]

By the turn of the century, the Follett House had fallen into a decline. That decline seems to parallel the deaths of Follett and Norris. When Follett died at the age of forty-five, in 1864, the hotel sold for the surprisingly low price of ten-thousand dollars.[15] It remained a hotel until the 1890s. During that time it was called the Roberts House- a tavern with upstairs rooms for sleeping. Joseph Thompson relates a funny yet tragic story about one of the final times it was sold:

> ...Denny Doyle sold the Follett House. It seems business had fallen off quite a lot. Denny had wanted to sell the place so he heard about a fellow by the name of Mathias who was looking for a tavern so he invited him to Ypsilanti to take a look at the Follett House. Denny was a little bit unscrupulous in his business actions but he got a group of fellows to go to Ann Arbor with suit cases and another group to go down to Wayne and when the Michigan Central train came in these fellows flocked into the Follett House to register and stay over night. Mathias was sitting in the lobby and he looked over the crowd and just then the train came in. Well, the bar was doing business and the barber shop was doing business and Mathias was mesmerized by the amount of business he anticipated so he bought the place; and didn't they sell him another place up in the Thompson Building for an overflow of his patrons.[16]

Late in the century, the space at the west end of the structure was occupied by the Ypsilanti Reed Furniture Company, with a hardware store and a tin smith filling in the space at the rear of the building. In early 1900 the furniture manufacturer moved to Jackson where prison labor

was available much cheaper. A 1909 Sanborn Map (fig. 9) shows nineteen-twenty-five vacant and number seventeen occupied by an electrical and wallpaper store. In 1910, the building was sold in two parts and the front entrance was sealed."The bottom floor was turned into a retail shop and the top two floors-including the magnificent ballroom-was turned into a warehouse." [17]

Two factors brought about the rapid decline of the Depot Town area-the automobile and the Great Depression. The railroad no longer provided the link between urban areas. The economic crisis dealt the death blow to the rail system and therefore to communities that depended on rail travel. Ironically, another mode of transportation brought about the re-birth of the downtown area of Ypsilanti in a new era-air transportation. During World War Two the bomber plant at Willow Run brought thousands of people to the area. Strangely, little attention was focused on Depot Town. It became the refuge for derelicts and motorcycle gangs. Thus, passed the golden days of the railroad and with them, the golden era of Depot Town.

III. Townscape

In the mid-ninteenth century, Depot Town had two anchors, the Follett House on the west end and the Norris-Thompson Building on the east end. The "Thompson Building" was built by O.E. Thompson in the same Italianate style as was popular during the 1860s. Mark Norris gave financial backing to Thompson after his hotel business venture failed. He used the bricks from the Great Western Hotel just across the street to build the structure. The building was completed just as the Civil War broke out, so it was used as a temporary barracks for the local volunteers. It was later utilized for the manufacture of building supplies, carriages, wagons bicycles and farm implements. According to Joseph Thompson, it also served as a fire station for a time. If you look closely, you can still see "Thompson" written diagonally across the south end of the building.

The end of the block closest to the rail depot boasted of another hotel called the Neat House. "Oliver Westfall [the inspiration for the bar there later to be called 'Oliver's Alibi'] had the hotel with bar down stairs and sleeping rooms for 15-20 people upstairs."[18] Continuing in that block was a drug store owned by Mr. Clark and Mr. House and a meat market next door.

Across the alley, now Rice Street, from the Follet House was one of two mills owned by the Deubel Brothers, in which Follett and Norris had a interest. The Frog Island industrial site completed the commercial holdings on the north side of the street from River Street to the river. (fig. 10)

On the south side of Cross Street, opposite the hotel was a law office, a grocery store, a coal yard and a junk dealer (now called antiques). Next to the junk dealer was a cigar store owned by Chris Duress:

> They called him 'Doc' for he concocted a remedy that he claimed would restore lost manhood. He filled his window one day with this remedy and the sun came through the window pretty bright and the bottles exploded and blew out the front window so I guess he did away with his remedy after that experience.[19]

In the commercial block just east was a bakery and candy store. The owner was said to have invented the unicycle. Across the alley stood a shoe store and a justice of the peace office. Upstairs over the two shops was the Masonic Hall, before it moved to its present site on North Huron. The building is a very attractive brick commercial structure with arched Gothic windows, on the upper floors. The lower level contained a barber shop and a restaurant, which is its current usage. (fig.11)

Next door, in another Italiante brick building with window hoods similar to those in the Follet House was what was popularly called a "horse exchange":

> It was where a bunch of gamblers came out from Detroit every day on the Michigan Central and it was what you call 'off-track betting'.... That place was run by Warren Lewis....Upstairs over the horse exchange was a house of ill-repute. 'Ma' Bush was the landlady....[20]

A cigar store and a saloon rounded out the Depot Town commercial area, The last building on the block was struck by a train and no longer exists.

The "horse exchange" is now occupied by the Thomas Dodd family. They have created a most unusual living space out of the second and third floors of the building. (fig. 12 and fig. 13).

IV. Current Usage

Mayflower Moving and Storage moved out of the building in 1970 and it remained vacant until 1975. Time and weather did a great deal of internal damage. In 1980 Carolyn and Gary McKeever began to carve out a new living space on the upper floor of the east end of the structure. Their apartment boasts twelve foot ceilings in their 1500 square feet of living space. This was the culmination of seven years of planning and dreaming by a determined group of people headed by Alex and Marybelle Suczek, Jerry Meadows and the McKeevers. The Suczeks and Meadows who own the west end of the building, have formed the Follett House Associates, to fund and re-develop Depot Town. (fig. 14)

The retail aspect of the ground floor appears to be doing well. There are five storefronts occupied at present: the deli owned by Meadows and the Suczeks will open this winter, the Health Emporium, Jacqueline's Plaster Crafts, ~~This and That~~ WHEN IN DOUBT.. boutique, and an antique store. Four apartments are rented on the upper floors and the ballroom is in the midst of refurbishment. Meadows is hopeful that it can "once again become a cultural centerpiece-if some obstacles can be removed."[21] (fig. 15)

He goes on:

> We could have it functioning in 60 to 90 days with proper funding. We've got the executive ability, architectural ability, the need, but our big problem is getting conservative minds to realize that Depot Town is starting their diversification from the auto industry....[22]

The hopes of Depot Town Associates are focused on two structures right now-the Follett House and the depot, just as they were back in the golden days of Depot Town. (fig. 16)

V. Methodology

The fact that the Follett House has always been the center of attention made it less difficult to do research. The current owners have been co-operative and extremely helpful. Maps from the ninteenth century were an invaluable source of information, as well as the "Gleanings" reprints of the history of Ypsilanti. The Bentley Museum at the University of Michigan provided me with much background information on Ypsilanti and surrounding area in the nineteenth century. The back issues of the Ypsilanti Press, Ann Arbor News and a commerative issue of the Ypsilanti Panorama were most helpful. The Chapman History of Washtenaw County, and Harvey Colburn's Story of Ypsilanti, both give a clear picuture of the two men, Norris and Follett.

In researching the architectural styling, I used the books Images of American Living:Four Centuries of Architecture and Furniture as Cultural Examples by Alan Gowans, Identifying American Architecture by John Blumenson, and A Field Guide to American Architecture by Carole Rifkind. The Ypsilanti Historical Archives provided me with descriptions of the building in letters exchanged between Norris and his wife Rosena. The Eastern Michigan University HABS documents and measured drawings served as guides to determine the Italianate style.

Builder

JAMES M. CURTIS (1818-1865)

Michigan State Normal College - gone

Hewitt Block - was 3 floors - now 2 floors - 130 W. Michigan
(built 1851 after the fire)

Samson Store (C.E. Woodard was engineer-designer)
118 W. Michigan (Weinman-Matthews Drug Store built
after the fire and changed by Fred Dieterle 1951)

Samson House - 302 W. Cross

Follett Hotel - built 1858 - E. Cross Street

Parmenio Davis residence - 112 S. Washington

Union School - gone - 210 W. Cross

Gilbert Residence - built 1860 - 227 N. Grove

Last work was on St James Hotel - Ann Arbor (117-23 W. Huron)

Earliest contract was for the Wayne County Poorhouse at Eloise -
a wing has been added on each side of the old building.

All of these buildings are built of brick and stone.

James M. Curtiss married Harriet M. Samson, November 17, 1841 -

He was born on a farm July 3rd, 1818, Genesee, Livingston County, New York, and after country school, attended Avon Academy, Buffalo, New York, taking Architecture, later learning the trade of mason - working in Buffalo.

About 1835, moved to Ypsilanti, Michigan, following his trade as a mason and building contractor.

Died January 20, 1865, buried in old century on Prospect Street - later the bodies of the Curtiss family were moved to Highland Cemetery.

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INFORMATION FURNISHED IN 1931 BY Frank Curtiss, son of James M., now deceased.